

Seabees celebrate 60th Anniversary in style

By Linda Wadley

NCBC Public Affairs

PORT HUENEME, Calif. – Some say it was the best Seabee Ball ever. The Navy Band was fantastic, the lights and decorations rocked, and the food was great. These were some of the comments echoed over and over again by guests at the 2002 Seabee Ball.

Almost 950 Seabees and friends gathered together March 2 at the transformed “802 warehouse” here to celebrate the 60th year of the Seabees and the 135th year of the Civil Engineer Corps.

Guest speaker (ret.) Rear Adm. Jack Buffington, who served more than thirty-four years in the Civil Engineer Corps and retired in 1995 after his tour of duty as Chief of Civil Engineers and Commander, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, praised the Seabees’ distinguished history and expressed his honor in being a part of this 60th anniversary.

“I couldn’t be more proud to be here,” said Buffington, who himself served six tours with the Seabees. Buffington went on to say that since 1942 the Seabees have proved themselves over and over again playing a critical role in the success of military operations from World War II, to Vietnam, in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm to their present role in Operation Enduring Freedom. He mentioned that their recent portrayal in the History Channel segment “Dangerous Missions” was an honorable account of their accomplishments and had brought their story to the American public.

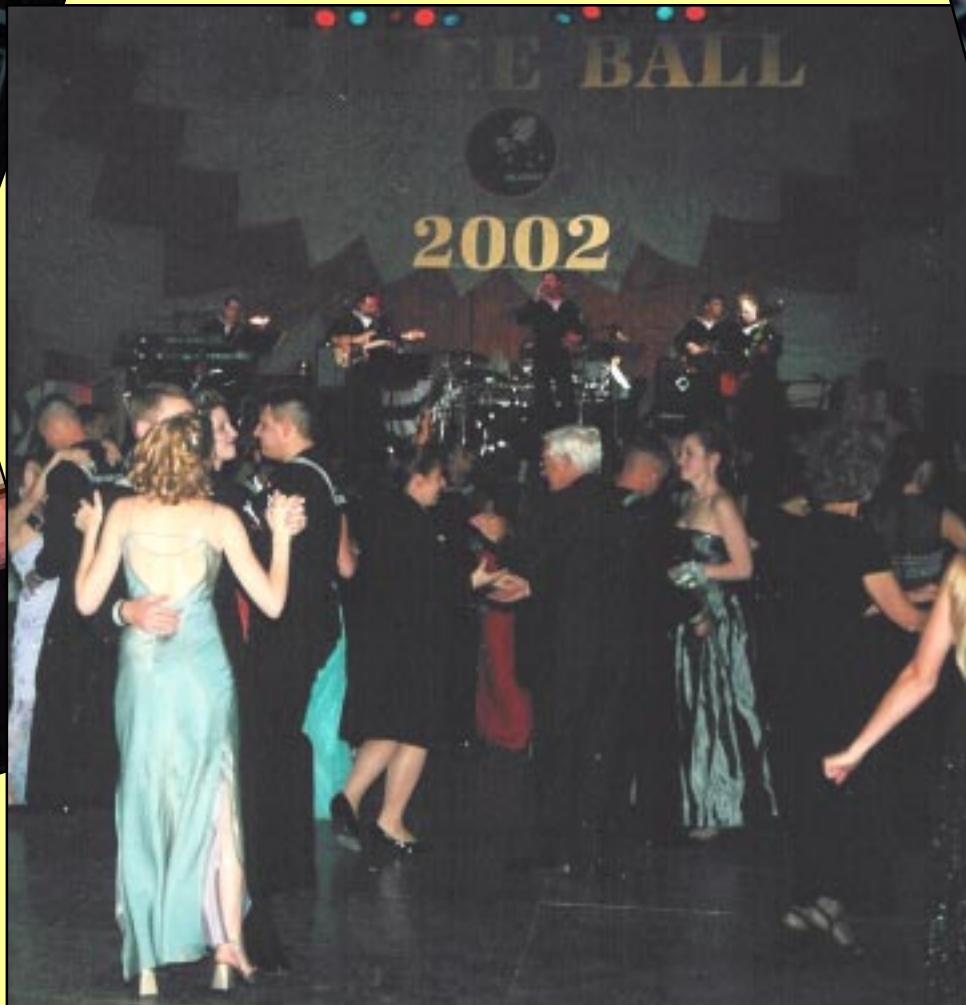
EQCM (SCW) Don Turner, who served as Master Chief Pacific Fleet Seabees prior to his retirement, was the master of ceremonies. Turner, who has a strong link to Port Hueneme Seabees after serving with all four Port Hueneme battalions, the Thirty-First Naval Construction Regiment and Naval Construction Battalion Center, Port Hueneme, lent a special local flavor to the festivities. In keeping with Seabee Ball tradition, Turner called for the youngest and oldest Seabee for the cutting of the cake. Capt. Warren Klam, medical officer, Thirty-First Naval Construction Regiment/3rd Naval Construction Brigade, was deemed the oldest Seabee. The youngest Seabee, CA Jason Willcox, coincidentally had reported aboard the Naval Construction Training Center only three days before the ball.

Even from afar, there was no mistaking an important event was taking place. Outside the ballroom, a sky tracker, with rotating lights shot four beams in the sky leading guests to the front door. Guests were welcomed to the ball through a lighted “Seabee Ball” marquee with premier Hollywood flood lights superimposing giant 20-foot Seabee logos on either side of the entrance.

Lt. Dan Grimsbo, Seabee Ball chairman, said heading up the ball was both a unique and rewarding experience. “I’ve learned a lot about areas out of my expertise, such as catering, memorabilia and marketing which will be useful in managing other projects and events. For the Seabee Ball, we just followed our mission statement as a path to success.” Grimsbo said the committee determined they would measure success by the smiles they saw during and at the end of the Seabee Ball. “We saw lots of smiles and heard good comments about the layout, band and the overall look of the ball that people really liked.”

In addition to producing miles of smiles on the faces of guests, the Seabee Ball “Operation Rose Relief” raised \$500 for the Navy/Marine Corps Relief Society’s Pentagon Assistance Fund through the sale of patriotic corsages.

Summing up the 2002 Seabee Ball Grimsbo said, “It takes the effort of hundreds of dedicated people to make the Seabee Ball a success, from those who volunteer a few hours to those who work all year, to the people who attend the ball to join the fun. And ultimately it’s gathering of friends, new and old, that makes it a memorable event.”



All photos by PH3 Brian Bynem. Clockwise from top left:
The Color Guard presents the 60th Birthday cake to Capt. Cowell, Rear Adm Buffington, the youngest, and oldest seabees present for cutting.
Lt. Dave Lu, NCTC, picks up his reserved corsage for his date. Profits of the corsage sale go to the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society’s Pentagon relief fund, which earned \$500.
From left to right, EO2 Pat Harden NMCB-40, wife Dena, CE2 Joe Speer and Chrissy Forrest enjoy the ball.
Capt. Jim Cowell, CA Jason Willcox, NCTC student (youngest Seabee), Rear Adm. Jack E. Buffington, retired, and Capt. Warren Klam, Medical officer 3rd NCB, (oldest Seabee), cut the 60th birthday cake.
BU2 Jason Peterson and BU2 Shannon Coykendall of 31st NCR, demonstrate a variety of Seabee weapons and equipment for the guests.
BU1 (SCW) Kelly Reno of NCTC gives an outstanding performance of our national anthem.
Capt. Jim Cowell presents Rear Adm Buffington with a Seabee hand-made afghan and coin plaque.
Navy Band Southwest, Millenium, out of North Island, kept the dance floor going with a modern variety of music until midnight when the party ended.

